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CULTURE

Fantasia is a great reason to head indoors

Irrepressible programmer **Mitch Davis** is determined that we all confront the things that haunt us

JOHN GRIFFIN

Thursday evening was a good time to be alive in downtown Montreal.

Shortly after 6 p.m., the line outside Concordia University's Hall Building on de Maisonneuve Blvd. W. snaked around the corner and up toward the mountain, where crowds were also gathering for the Alouettes football game at McGill Stadium.

The Con U. mob was in place for the opening of the 10th Fantasia Film Festival, an increasingly high-profile event held at this time of year to celebrate what is called "genre" film. While the exact meaning of the word in this context escapes me, it refers to horror, fantasy, animation, martial arts, psychodrama, elastic Asian film culture and outsider cinema when applied to Fantasia.

And it seems to be working. Thursday's premiere of Neil Marshall's British screamer The Descent was packed, and its theme of claustrophobia during a caving expedition gone horribly wrong clearly communicated.

Hours later, some were still shaking off the effects of a lifetime in analysis being ruined in 99 short minutes.

Hours after viewing Neil Marshall's The Descent, some were still shaking off the effects of a lifetime in analysis being ruined in 99 minutes.

Between the Hall Building and the DJ-driven Fantasia after-party at SAT on St. Laurent Blvd. below Ste. Catherine St. lay the juggernaut of the Montreal International Jazz Festival and the siren allure of its free outdoor programming.

Italy's Peppino D'Agostino and America's Stef Burns teamed up for a harmonious guitar summit at the corner of Jeanne Mance and de Maisonneuve, but they were a pit stop on the way to the Loto-Québec blues stage for a date with N.D.G.'s pop-cultural anthropologists, the Shane Murphy Trio.

Analysis of this particular show will be left to colleagues more closely associated with the game in 2006. I will say only its convergence of art, soul and showmanship represented a high point of this or any other jazz fest. And I've seen 27 of them.

The fact a woodpecker could get down to business on the fruit trees in Fred Barry Park during a free-flowing, airtight set was proof the trio are operating in harmony, both with nature and the gods of all things rock 'n' roll.

For the masses that gave them a standing ovation after a show that landed exactly at the prescribed 60-minute mark, it was a chance to say "I saw them when."

The Murphy experience was also an opportunity to double-dedutch after a day screening films from Fantasia. Thanks to irrepressible programmer Mitch Davis and his determination that we all confront the things that haunt us, a package had landed that contained DVD copies of festival titles Wilderness, The Living and the Dead, Strange Circus, The Gravedancers and Funky Forest: The First Contact. It was a sunny day outside. Inside lay the ironic heart of darkness.

Michael J. Bassett's sharply mounted Wilderness was a favourite, perhaps because this Northern Ireland entry in a Fantasia spotlight series called Bloody Blighty: The U.K. New Wave was easy to follow.

In a sentence: Sociopathic Borstal boys are exiled to a "deserted" island for survival training after bullying has claimed a life-through-suicide of a sensitive colleague. Of this twisted shocker we will say no more, other than to remind dog owners of the importance of proper training.

Simon Rumley's elegant The Living and the Dead is another U.K. entry, this time set in the decaying ancestral pile of a family that may have married into itself by one generation too many.

Leo Bill is a howl as the unwell man-child who decides to care for his beloved, bed-ridden mother without grasping the essential nature of "care." This psychodrama plays out as nightmare, and you are in it.

Strange Circus is just that – a surreal, fetishistic, wonderfully dressed roundelay from Japan's Sion Sono that confirms the things a child is forced to endure will resonate into adulthood. And not necessarily in a good way.

Mike Mendez's The Gravedancers looked like American shock schlock before the print degraded, but it comes highly touted by no less an authority than Mitch Davis.

He is also huge on Funky Forest: The First Contact, a Japanese pop-cult variety show so far off the scale of what we multiplex denizens consider conventional narrative cinema that it defies description. But that's Fantasia for you. Nothing is forbidden. Everything is embraced.

Embrace **Fantasia** until July 24 at Concordia's Hall Theatre, 1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. W., and the J.A. de Sève Cinema, 1400 de Maisonneuve Blvd. W. Tickets are available at the Hall Theatre, and through Admission (514-790-1245). Individual tickets are $7.50. Buy 10 tickets and the price drops to $6.50 a ticket. The invaluable, 200-page catalogue costs $5.

Free outdoor screenings are set for Friday and July 15, 21 and 22, in Parc de la Paix (on St. Laurent Blvd., between Ste. Catherine St. and René Lévesque Blvd.), beginning at 9 p.m. Weather permitting. For more information, log on to www.fantasiafestival.com.

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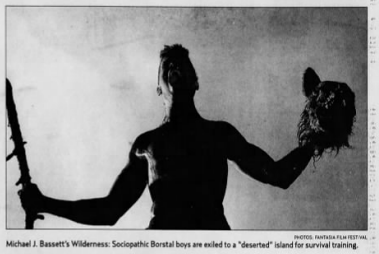

PHOTOS: FANTASIA FILM FESTIVAL

Michael J. Bassett's Wilderness: Sociopathic Borstal boys are exiled to a "deserted" island for survival training.

Simon Rumley's The Living and the Dead is set in an ancestral pile of a family that may have married into itself by one generation too many.

For today's Fantasia schedule, please see our movie listings on Pages E6-7.

best bets
The King and more
a selection of events today

THEATRE

Elvis Story is the long-running Quebec City hit that many in the capital (including my mother) treated themselves to seeing over and over again. The reason for the devotion, the show's fans will gladly tell you: Martin Fontaine's performance as The King is not really acting, but actually spiritual channelling. Directed by celeb René Simard, this mega-production (40 performers, 12 musicians) is, here also, one of the hottest tickets in town. If you want to see it, move fast. It's at the Bell Centre until Aug. 6. Tickets $57 to $87. **Call 514-790-1240 or visit www.gog.ca.** (Gaëtan L. Charlebois)

FILM

Montreal International Jazz Festival: Ciné-Jazz. That big thing in the middle of the room? It's still the jazz festival. And the film component – Ciné-Jazz – continues all weekend in the rain-free, air-conditioned confort of the Cinémathèque québécoise, 335 de Maisonneuve Blvd. E. Today's program includes Tango pour Astor, at 6 p.m. Tickets cost $7. **Call 514-842-9763 or visit www.cinematheque.qc.ca, or consult the free festival program.** (John Griffin)

Fantasia: The 10th edition of the most important genre film festival in North America – and the second-largest film event in our own dear city, with 75,000 heads counted last year – continues until July 24 in two Concordia University locations: 1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. W. and 1400 de Maisonneuve Blvd. W. There are 90 features and 125 short films in all, devoted to fantasy, martial arts, horror, crime, black comedy, animation, Asian everything and anything else that might slither into the deep recesses of the organizers' brains. **The full sked is posted at www.fantasiafestival.com.** (JG)

CLASSICAL

Lanaudière Festival. The great summer classical bash outside Joliette opens today in the acoustically splendid amphitheatre with a bold coupling of Liszt's two piano concertos with Nicholas Angelich and Gabriela Montero claiming one apiece. There is also some Mozart choral music on this usual program. Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts the Orchestre Métropolitain, starting at 8 p.m. **Call 1-800-561-4543.** (Arthur Kaptainis)

Our comprehensive listings package in Friday's Preview section is meant to be kept for use throughout the week. To see our complete online listings, go to www.montrealgazette.com and click on the **City Guides: Montreal** link. Search by venue, events, date and category.

NOTES FROM THE JAZZ FEST

Thursday

Why can't there be more shows like the **Daniel Lanois-Emmylou Harris** double bill at Salle Wilfrid Pelletier of Place des Arts? Leaving aside the top-notch musical content for a second, the duo hit the stage at 8 and played straight through – no time-wasting support act, no jive 30-minute intermission. Just music. Harris, beautiful as ever, duetted with Lanois on seven songs, including show-opener The Maker and Bob Dylan's Every Grain of Sand, then left the stage. And it was carte blanche for Lanois, ably backed by his three-piece band, to unleash some of his blue-chip catalogue material, often punctuated by torrents of apocalyptic guitar that crossed Neil Young's primitive attack with Jack White's idiot-savant garage blues. Harris returned at the end to join Lanois on, among other things, a surreal version of Jimi Hendrix's Hey This Be Love. Was any of this jazz? Well ... nah. But were there Everly Brothers-type harmonies, weird psychedelic soundscapes and just plain great songs? You bet. Purists could nurse their wounds at shows by **Aldo Romano**, the **Pierre François Quartet** or the **Joëlle Léandre Trio**, all of whom were playing elsewhere at the same time.

BERNARD PERUSSE

Guitar hero **Pat Martino's** show at the Spectrum was a sharp reminder of how pure artistry can carry a show. There was nothing new in what he played, no bold concepts to declare – Martino just worked diligently on rhythms like there was no tomorrow. The evening hung on ghosts of legends with whom he naturally feels akin: Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Wes Montgomery, all performed with spectacular driving insight, yet totally nonchalant. Martino was the festival's Mr. Cool, taking care of business – and if someone says he's hip today, well, so what else is new?

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

There was a relentless rhythmic, kinetic edge to the **Brazilian Girls** performance at Club Soda that more or less transcended taste.

Metallic, shimmering, oh-so pop and ever so corrosive, this sound appealed mightily to the fullest house so far at the fest's midnight electro series. Swaggering vocalist **Sabina Schibbe's** exhortations were informed by the knowledge that she was useless without the corrugated rhythms. This was robust dance music that was totally transporting. Like, elsewhere.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

Quadro Nuevo presented a lesson in the infectious multilingual language of world music (or whatever you want to label it) that didn't sound like a lesson, at a packed Salles du Gesù. The German quartet nominally took off on tango, travelling through Persian and Greek sonorities and somehow arriving at the intimacy of Paris musette. The tour was guided by saxophonist **Mulo Francel**, whose dour song introductions were as informative as they were iconoclastic.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

Reader Don Prokosh called in to rave about the jazz festival in general, but he also had a few words to say about Wednesday's **Paris Bamako** show at Metropolis, with **Amadou and Mariam** headlining. "There were very few seats. We arrived at 7:10 for the 8:30 show and were told it was standing-room only," he said. "And there was this generally aggressive feeling: Run to get in, fight for your spot. And if you moved, even to go to the bathroom, someone would take your place. I'd forgotten how bad it was." Reader and former Gazette business reporter Craig Toomey emailed similar comments about the show: "This is what you get for almost $50? My wife, Rekha, and I managed to grab a couple of stools from a basement room and haul them up to the very back row upstairs. The place seemed to be fire-code-breaking crowded and most people had to stand for four-plus hours straight! We were out the door by 12:15 a.m., presumably well before they wrapped things up," he wrote. "This'll make me think twice about ever going to an indoor jazz fest concert again!"

There's a term for this, people: audience abuse.

BERNARD PERUSSE

DISC OF THE DAY

Matt Dusk

Back in Town

Decca

Toronto-born Dusk appeals to fans of Michael Bublé, although he doesn't quite have Bublé's singularity of purpose. The followup to his 2004 debut, Two Shots, is pretty straight-ahead easy listening that goes down as easy as a five o'clock cocktail. The material here consists of standards like More and a swingin' Get Me to the Church on Time, mixed with contemporary songs in the same smooth tradition, like the title track and Where Were You When. Making their presence felt on Dusk's Sinatra-lite offering are silky strings, punchy brass and a deep-in-the-pocket rhythm section. You got a better formula? **(Matt Dusk performs tonight at 7 at Club Soda, 1225 St. Laurent Blvd. The show is sold out.)**

BERNARD PERUSSE

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